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An address should not determine suitability for employment - Butler

Someone's address should not determine whether he or she is suitable to be employed, Waterford Fianna Fáil Deputy Mary Butler told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on a Private Members' Equality Bill, brought forward by Fianna Fáil, she said a growing problem in recent years is discrimination based on socioeconomic or social background. "Many people living in disadvantaged areas have found it difficult to secure jobs simply because they live in a certain area," she said. "Their applications are not being considered on merit and instead they face arbitrary barriers which have a detrimental impact on their lives. This form of inequality needs to be tackled. Given the current housing crisis, many people are no longer able to live in their area of choice. It is now determined by cost and how much a person is earning."

Being rejected after a job interview can severely dent someone's confidence, she said. "Many people I have met during the years tortuously dwell on being turned down," she said. "Rejection is very unpleasant but to lose out on a job because of where one lives is a bitter pill to swallow. If someone is suitably qualified and able to perform a job, his or her address should not and must not be a determining factor."

If the Bill were to be enacted, Deputy Butler said employers would not be able to discriminate against a job applicant because he or she came from what would be perceived as a disadvantaged address or an area associated with higher levels of criminality or anti-social behaviour. "Similarly, children applying for admission to schools could not face discrimination on the basis of their address," she said. "In the past few years school boards of management have come under increasing pressure because schools are oversubscribed. I particularly welcome the Admission to Schools Bill which explicitly bans discrimination in school admissions. Every school must be welcoming of every young person, regardless of his or her race, ability or disability and now address."

Persons who are living in poverty or poor neighbourhoods and who are unemployed and relying on social protection payments experience discrimination based on their socioeconomic status, she said. "It creates a vicious circle from which it is difficult to escape. This perpetuates their disadvantaged status. Some of these instances of discrimination can only be tackled effectively by using a socioeconomic status ground."

Sale of quarries a severe blow to the south-east

The recent forced sale of quarries owned by Dan Morrissey Ireland Limited in Co Carlow will deal a further severe blow to jobs in the south-east, Fianna Fail deputy John McGuinness told the Dáil.

Over 100 families are employed by the company concerned, he said. “I ask the Government to intervene with a bank which is owned by the taxpayer, AIB, to ensure the sale will not go ahead or that it will not go ahead without discussing the matter with the Morrisseys, the family who own the lots.”

The sale will also have an impact on the marketplace because there are three super players in the quarry industry in this country who control everything, he said. Deputy McGuinness said the company supplies most of the county councils in the south-east. “It has a 100-year record and worked with AIB while in receivership, fulfilling almost €3 million worth of contracts in the course of the receivership,” he said. “It has an excellent record.”

In its advertising, AIB states it is "backing brave", he said. “Let it back the brave who spent 100 years building a company and worked with it during receivership, kept jobs and fulfilled contracts.”

In response, Minister of State Pat Breen said supporting enterprise development in all regions of the country to support job creation is a key objective of the Government, with initiatives such as the regional Action Plans for Jobs seeking to build on the capabilities and strengths of each region to maximise enterprise growth and job creation .

“The south-east plan which covers the area under discussion is the key policy response for supporting employment growth in the south-east region, with public and private stakeholders actively engaged in delivering a range of innovative and practical actions set out in the plan,” he said. “The core objective of the plan is to create a further 25,000 jobs in the region by 2020 in the counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford and reduce the unemployment rate to within 1% of the State average.”

Although Enterprise Ireland does not fund companies to assist them to trade on the domestic market, its potential exporters division was in contact with the company to discuss exporting options and understands it was not exporting, he said. “The agency, therefore, was not in a position to assist further.”